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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008

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In Today's Papers

Headscarf Debate Continuous

All papers continue giving extensive front-page coverage to the ongoing 'turban debate' in Turkey, with secularist circles opposing the ruling AKP-MHP sponsored effort to lift the headscarf ban in universities through a constitutional amendment. Liberal Radikal says Turkey is divided into two as the parliament prepares to discuss a lift of the ban with trade unions and NGOs divided on the reform. Parliament is set to debate the amendment this week. The ban would remain for teachers and civil servants. Members of Turkey's judiciary and leading businessmen have already criticized the AKP-MHP's move. The main opposition CHP has said it would try to block the reform through the Constitutional Court. The Turkish military has made clear it is closely watching the debates, but has so far refrained from directly commenting on the headscarf proposal.

On Saturday, more than 120,000 Turks held rallies in the capital Ankara and 17 other cities across Turkey against the headscarf reform, which they say would open the way for a radical form of Islam in Turkey. Women's organizations will reportedly stage new rallies on February 9.

Prime Minister Erdogan told a gathering in Istanbul late Saturday that those who claim Turkey will become a religious state were actually the ones dividing society by blaming everybody who thinks or dresses differently for being an enemy of secularism. Papers report retired high justice Sabih Kanadoglu, the Court of Appeals' honorary chief prosecutor, said the headscarf ban cannot be removed because it would be against the basic tenets of the constitution.

Meanwhile, papers report Joost Lagendijk, co-chairman of Turkey-EU

joint parliamentary commission, told a 'Turkey-EU' conference in the Netherlands, "Parties should work out a compromise and accept that university students are grown-ups capable of making their own decisions."

Editorial Commentary on Turban Freedom in Universities

Semih Idiz observed in mainstream Milliyet (2/4): "At a recent press conference, FM Ali Babacan said that turban freedom in the universities is a requirement in the democratic EU reforms. However, passing the ball to the EU on the turban issue was not received positively by EU circles. Diplomatic circles I met with during the weekend reiterated that the EU doesn't have an official position on the turban issue. They did not find Babacan's efforts to try and fit the turban issue into a "general freedoms" framework for obvious reasons: if the issue is implementing the "Copenhagen Criteria" for freedoms, then Ankara has many other things to do urgently. For example, Brussels is always pressuring Turkey to amend Article 301 and eliminate the punishment of thought. But there have been no positive developments on this issue since the 2007 elections. While the government is not exerting any efforts to eliminate obstacles to freedom of thought, FM Babacan's efforts to fit turban freedom into the EU reforms' framework was greeted by skepticism from the EU. Turkey has a long list on its hands - from Article 301 to women's rights and minority rights - to correct in order to bring 'first class democracy' to the country. Therefore, Babacan's comments are nothing but sheer demagoguery. Never mind the EU, he can't even convince anyone in Turkey."

Mehmet Yilmaz commented in mainstream Hurriyet (2/4): "The photos of the AKP-MHP's turban freedom initiative and the rallies in Ankara and in the other provinces over the weekend to protest the lifting of the turban ban in universities might have caused fear among the public. But I don't think there is any need for fear because all these pictures show is that Turks are waking up and realizing that it's not a bad thing to protest against wrong political initiatives. The Turkish public, eventually, has managed to get rid of its

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hesitance to use democratic rights. I believe that this democratic consciousness is the most important guarantee for those concerned about the future of the secular-democratic republic as well as for others who are scared of being forced to open their minds. However, if civic sensitivity can be demonstrated in such a fashion in Turkey, then nobody should be afraid of a military coup or a change of regime. The latest developments prove that the secular and democratic republic is rooted deeply in Turkey."

10 PKK Terrorists Killed in Bingol

Sabah, Hurriyet, Milliyet and others: The Turkish General Staff announced on its web site on Sunday that 10 PKK terrorists were killed in rural parts of Ortacanak village in Bingol province. They were killed after they opened fire on security forces warning them not to fire. Turkish troops seized ammunition, illegal documents and other materials in the terrorists' hideouts.

Turkish Journalists in Kandil Mountains

Mainstream "Sabah" writes that journalists/writers Ahmet Altan and Yasemin Congar went to Kandil mountain in northern Iraq to talk to PKK leaders. Altan reported that PKKers are expecting a land operation in spring and have faced difficulties since Talabani's forces surrounded Kandil and made access more difficult. They also said that they are living in tents in fields as a result of Turkish air operations.

Babacan: 2008 Will be Year of EU Reforms in Turkey

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan told a news conference Saturday the ruling AKP government would surprise everyone with its EU-oriented reforms in 2008. Babacan said Turkey has a new president, parliament and government, and its infrastructure is ready for a wave of reform. Babacan noted that the law on non-Muslim minority foundations was ready, and that there were moves to amend Article 301 of the penal code. On Friday, the Turkish Parliament approved a bill that will permit minority foundations to acquire property, receive donations and seek compensations for their properties sold to third persons. Turkey's government wants to expand freedoms to turn Turkey into a "first-class democracy where freedoms in all

fields are enjoyed fully", Babacan emphasized.
Babacan said the heated debates over the headscarf issue and rising tensions taint Turkey's image. Babacan also noted foreign investments in Turkey in 2006 and 2007 stood at over USD 20 billion.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- Ten PKK terrorists were killed in clashes with the security forces in the eastern province of Bingol.
- On Sunday, more than 5,000 Alevis rallied in Istanbul to denounce the ruling AKP government's Alevi policies.
- Turkish Farming Ministry officials said bird flu virus was detected in dead chickens found in the Black Sea coastal province of Samsun.

International News

- Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis said the visit of Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis to Turkey opened a new page in bilateral relations, adding that their strategic goal was to relieve all strains in Turkey-Greece ties.
- Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are running neck-and-neck in California, New Jersey and Missouri before the "Super Tuesday" presidential primary showdown.

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- US First Lady Laura Bush said in an interview with Fox News she is currently reading "My Name is Red," a book by Nobel literature prize winner, Orhan Pamuk.
- WILSON